

# Flame-resistant suits protect troops under fire

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FALLUJAH, Iraq — Marine commanders are outfitting their troops with flame-resistant flight suits in Iraq to ward off burns from the No. 1 killer here: roadside bombs.

It's another sign of how troops in the field have adapted to the deadly insurgency. Earlier in the war, troops added their own armor to vehicles and devised their own makeshift electronic jamming devices to foil the growing power and sophistication of the bombs they encountered.

Marine commanders in Iraq took the initiative to issue flame- and heat-resistant clothing made from a DuPont-manufactured fiber called Nomex, said Lt. Col. Bryan Salas, a spokesman for Multi-National Force West. That group commands about 33,000 troops in western Iraq, the heart of the Sunni-based insurgency.

The intense heat from the bombs, called improvised explosive devices or IEDs, led Marine commanders to get the protective apparel, Salas said.

Troops who ride in tanks, trucks and armored personnel carriers received most of the first suits.

Explosives kill or wound more troops than any other weapon in Iraq, according to Pentagon records. Through Tuesday, roadside bombs have killed more than 1,200 U.S. servicemembers and wounded more than 11,000 others.

So far, the Marines have issued more than 12,000 fire-resistant suits, said Capt. Jeff Landis, spokesman for the Marine Corps Systems Command.

Only those Marines who leave forward operating bases receive the suits, Landis said, so there's been enough to go around.

In February, the Marines started a research and development program to develop clothing — including shirt, gloves and suit — to help troops survive a fiery blast.

Marines stationed in restive Anbar province in western Iraq say they like the flame-resistant suits.

"The Marine Corps made a great decision with the issuing of flight suits to Marines in vehicles," said Marine Capt. Eric Dominijanni, 34.

He sends his Marines from the 5th Regimental Combat Team on patrol every day over roads pockmarked and scorched by bomb blasts. "Remember, all vehicles have fuel tanks," Dominijanni said. "If they explode, the suits protect us from burns"

Members of the 5,000-strong combat team received their first suits in February, said Lt.

Joseph King, a Marine spokesman. Troops received more of the dun-colored suits, dubbed "Poop Suits" by the Marines, in the spring, King said.

The Army also has begun to issue fire-resistant flight suits to tank and truck drivers in Iraq, said Lt. Col. Carl Ey, an Army spokesman at the Pentagon.

Next year, the Army plans to issue fire-resistant pullovers, boots and socks, records show.